



180 Their Arrival

Hades 1

I watched as the air craft landed, the flux churning at the glimpses of them from the windows. Unfortunately, no matter how much I wanted to shoot them out of the sky, it was least diplomatic thing to do, considering the fact that we had signed the alliance contract.

The last thing I needed at the moment was for shit to hit the fan, right when things were falling into place. The Valmonts would perish, just not yet.

We were still, allies on paper on paper but allies none the less. And as much as it erked me to no end, they were my in-laws. The aircraft landed.

The door slid open, and the first tendrils of their scent hit the air.

It was subtle at first, that underlying shift in atmosphere—not outright hostile, but far from friendly. The kind of tension that thickened the air, making it heavier with something unspoken, something just shy of dangerous.

I watched as Darius Valmont stepped out first,

his gait slow, measured, as if he had all the time in the world. He was smiling. Too wide. Too easy.

And his eyes—those sharp, unreadable things—were on me.

God I needed a stress ball or something.

I was one aggravating conversation away from shifting and ripping the old man into ribbons.

Luna Lyra followed, wrapped in sleek black, her expression a carefully constructed mask of cool indifference. She didn't so much as glance at the security agents and Gammas stationed along the perimeter, standing in perfect formation, weapons at the ready.

And then there was Beta James—silent, but his every step was deliberate. He had always been the quieter one, the watchful one, the man who stood just slightly behind but never outside of reach.

I exhaled slowly, my shoulders rolling back as I met them at the landing zone.

Diplomatic. That's what I needed to be. That's what I was supposed to be.

But my patience was already running thin.

"Alpha Darius," I greeted, my voice even. "Luna

Lyra. Beta James." A slight pause, my head tilting just enough to convey my irritation. "I would have arranged a proper reception if I'd been informed of your arrival."

Darius let out a quiet chuckle.

And then he said it.

"What's wrong with visiting my son-in-law?"

His voice was light. Casual.

But the words were a deliberate fucking move.

His smile stretched, reaching his eyes this time, something eerily knowing lurking behind them.

My jaw tightened. The Flux coiled at the base of my spine, hissing, waiting, but I didn't let it show.

Instead, I smiled back.

A slow, pointed thing.

"Nothing at all," I said, my voice calm, smooth as steel. "Though most would agree that an unannounced flight circling my airspace for nearly an hour sends the wrong message." I let the words hang for a second, just long enough. "I assume you had your reasons."

Darius inclined his head, unfazed. "I did."



No elaboration. No justification. Just that.

I let the silence stretch, watching him.

His game was simple—bait and observe.

Push just enough to see where the cracks formed. Press just enough to make me react. 1

I wasn't stupid.

But neither was he.

Luna Lyra was the first to break the pause.

"Perhaps we should discuss this inside, Alpha Hades," she said smoothly, her tone neutral, unreadable. "We wouldn't want to keep you in the cold for too long."

She was deflecting. Shifting the tone before I could push further.

Clever.

I nodded once, turning on my heel without another word, leading them toward the Obsidian Tower.

The path was silent, filled only with the sound of boots crunching against the ground, the distant hum of patrol units repositioning.

I could feel Darius' gaze on me.



Watching. Calculating.

And I knew—this was not just a visit

The way Kael glanced at me as we followed, told me he felt the same.

I sat at the head of the long, polished table, my fingers resting lightly against the surface, tapping once, twice—silent beats of control.

Darius took the chair opposite me, leaning back with the ease of a man completely at home, though we both knew he wasn't. Luna Lyra settled beside him, her movements graceful, measured, a quiet kind of strength in the way she held herself. Beta James, ever the silent observer, took his place to Darius' right, his expression giving away nothing.

Kael stood by the door, arms crossed, his presence a silent reminder that I was not alone in this room.

The air was thick. Suffocating.

And then Darius spoke.

"I hope Ellen is not too hurt by our coldness."

The words came easily, draped in something



almost gentle, as if he truly cared.

The Flux churned. I barely stopped myself from bristling.

"You reached out to her probably only twice in more than two months," I said, my voice even, though the edge of it was impossible to ignore. 1

It wasn't outright accusatory—not quite.

But it was pointed.

Darius sighed, slow and deliberate, as if weighing his response. "You know it was hard to let my little princess go," he murmured, shaking his head slightly. His voice had that wistful, fatherly lilt to it, the kind that made an outsider believe he was a man who had loved and lost. "But I know her. She is my daughter, after all."

He smiled—a small, rueful thing, like he was inviting me to share some secret understanding with him.

"Letting her adapt into her new world and role meant we had to cut her off just for a while."

I clenched my jaw, not reacting.

It was subtle—so subtle—the way he twisted it. Framed it as a kindness. A necessity. As though it had been a decision made for her sake rather

than their own.

Darius was good.

If I weren't who I was, if I didn't know better, I might have almost believed him.

Luna Lyra nodded beside him, her expression touched with something soft, sorrowful. "It was hard," she admitted, her voice catching just slightly, just enough to seem genuine. She reached up, brushing her fingers beneath her eyes, dabbing at tears that weren't quite there.

"You can imagine, Alpha Hades," she added. "Sending away our only daughter. Not being there for her during such an important transition."

There it was.

The subtle shift of blame.

Not on me—not directly.

But in the implication that circumstances had forced their hand. I was no saint, closer to the devil was what I was but they were her family. They could have made easier for her.

It was jarring how this suddenly mattered to me when it had not in the past. But things had changed between...us.



I wondered if they had showed a bit more care, if she would not be so hollowed out as she was now, both figuratively and literally.

But I could not put it past Darius since he must have ordered his own daughter's hollowing.

Now, they here making excuses as if fate had dictated this distance, not them.

That I, as Ellen's husband, should understand. Should be sympathetic.

I let the silence stretch.

Darius and Lyra were performers, that much was clear.

And James?

He watched. Unmoving. Detached.

He knew what this was.

He knew the game Darius was playing.

And he had chosen to let it unfold. I wondered if he fought for her.

"How considerate," I finally said, my tone cool. "To leave her to fend for herself. No visits. No letters. Just two calls that did more harm than good."



Darius sighed again, as if he had expected this. As if he was just the misunderstood father doing his best.

"It wasn't easy for us either, Hades," he said. "I wanted to be there. I wanted to see her, to remind her that she's still my daughter. But do you think she would have adapted if we clung to her? She needed space. Strength."

A slow pause. Then, carefully—"We both know Ellen is fragile, but she cannot stay fragile. She must grow into her new life, into what it means to be your mate."

I narrowed my eyes.

There it was.

Another twist.

Not quite an insult, but close.

Not saying she was weak. Not outright. But hinting that she was lacking.

That without them stepping back—she wouldn't survive.

I gritted my teeth, fangs elongating and piercing my mouth as I tried to rein in my anger and disgust



Ellen was anything but weak or lacking.

I tapped my fingers against the table once, a soft, rhythmic sound, letting the weight of his words settle.

Then I smiled, sure that wounds in my mouth and healed.

It wasn't warm. It wasn't kind.

It was calculated.

"As far as I'm concerned, Ellen is adapting just fine." I leaned forward slightly, my eyes locking onto Darius', making sure he understood the weight behind my next words. "With or without you."

Darius held my gaze.

A flicker of something passed through his eyes. Not anger, not quite.

But something close.

Lyra, however, exhaled softly, shaking her head. "Hades, dear, we didn't come here to argue with you. We came because we care."

The Flux coiled, hissing inside me.

A part of me wanted to laugh.



The audacity.

The fucking audacity.

Beta James finally spoke, his voice even, calm. "It was a strategic decision."

I turned my gaze to him, taking in the unreadable expression, the stoic mask.

"Strategic," I repeated.

"Yes," he replied, unbothered. "Ellen needed to settle into the Obsidian Pack, into her new life. Constant ties to Silverpine would have been a distraction. It was better for her to sever them early rather than later."

"Sever," I echoed, tilting my head.

Beta James did not falter.

"Temporarily."

It was so matter-of-fact, so clinical, that it was almost insulting.

Darius nodded, as if grateful for James' interjection. "You may not agree with our methods, Hades, but I trust you see the reasoning behind them."

I did.



I saw right through them.

They hadn't cut her off for her.

They had done it for themselves.

They had abandoned her not out of necessity, but out of convenience.

Like their hollowed daughter was a liability that could be sold for peace between our kinds.

How wrong they were.

She would be their undoing. They had no idea what was coming.

But what I did not know was what they would be doing here.

"Why are you here?" A pause. "Father." Bile rose in my throat.

"We came to see Ellen," Lyra revealed, her voice turned sharp. "The attempts on her life has reached us through the former Luna, Felicia Montegue." 3

My heart dropped to my stomach, the ground tilting beneath me, I felt Kael stiffen.

"It was reported that her mental health had taken a horrible hit therefore it is time we had a discussion on the fate of my daughter as it has



been made clear that she is not safe with her husband." 7

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